

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH
AMCONSUL CALI POUCH
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 3836

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJ: ELECTION CAMPAIGN: THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - 1978:
SOME BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

1. SUMMARY. THE EMERGENCE OF LIBERAL JULIO CESAR TURBAY AND CONSERVATIVE BELISARIO BETANCUR AS THE TWO MAJOR PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES REPRESENTS A SHARP BREAK WITH COLOMBIA'S PAST. THE TWO ALSO DIFFER BETWEEN THEMSELVES IN IMPORTANT WAYS REGARDING STYLE, BACKGROUND AND THEIR POWER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE RESPECTIVE PARTIES. TURBAY REPRESENTS THE CULMINATION OF A STEADY RISE TO POWER IN THE LIBERAL PARTY OF A NEW POLITICAL CLASS. THE POSSIBLE EMERGENCE OF HISTORIC LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE RANCOR DURING WHAT REMAINS OF THE CAMPAIGN WOULD INCREASE THE LEVEL OF STRIDENCE AS WELL AS THE LIKELIHOOD OF SOME CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE, BUT SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE CONTINUANCE OF LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE COOPERATION IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM REMAINS PREDOMINANT IN COLOMBIA. DESPITE A VARIETY OF CANDIDATES, PARTIES AND IDEOLOGIES - TO SUIT MOST TASTES OR PREFERENCES - THE REAL CONTEST IS BETWEEN THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES AND THEIR CANDIDATES: LIBERAL JULIO CESAR
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TURBAY AND CONSERVATIVE BELISARIO BETANCUR.

3. THE TWO CANDIDATES REPRESENT AN IMPORTANT, BUT LITTLE REMARKED UPON, BREAK WITH POLITICAL TRADITION. POLITICAL POWER IN COLOMBIA HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN THE HANDS OF COLOMBIA'S BROAD, VARIEGATED, RELATIVELY PROGRESSIVE, BUT EASILY RECOGNIZABLE, ECONOMIC AND SOEICAL ELITE. THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WAS A CLASSIC

EXAMPLE OF THAT TRADITION, WHEN ALL THREE CANDIDATES OF THE TWO PARTIES AND OF THE PRINCIPAL THIRD PARTY WERE OFFSPRING OF FORMER PRESIDENTS.

4. BETANCUR AND TURBAY ARE BOTH MEN OF HUMBLE ORIGINS, THE FORMER THE SON OF A POOR COAL MINING FAMILY FROM ANTIOQUIA, THE LATTER OF MODEST LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS. THE RESEMBLANCE ENDS THERE. BETANCUR HAS SINCE GONE ON TO ACQUIRE THE VISIBLE TRAPPINGS OF THE ELITE: UNIVERSITY DEGREE, A PROFESSION - THE LAW, CHARM AND SOCIAL GRACE, AND ENTREE INTO THE BEST SALONS AND CLUBS OF BOGOTA. HE LIVES AND DRESSES IN STYLE AND POSSESSES AT LEAST COMFORTABLE PERSONAL WEALTH. TURBAY LEFT SCHOOL EARLY TO BEGIN WORK. AT AGE 21, WHEN MOST MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS YOUTHS ARE STILL AT THE UNIVERSITY, HE WAS ALREADY MAYOR OF GIRARDOT. ALWAYS ACCESSIBLE TO PETITIONERS, MANY OF THEM THE POOR OR PRECINCT LEADERS, HE APPARENTLY SET HIMSELF THE EARLY AND SOLE GOAL OF THE ATTAINMENT OF POWER AS HE STEADILY ROSE THROUGH THE PARTY'S RANKS, GATHERING LOYALTIES AS WELL AS FRIENDSHIPS ON THE WAY. HIS LIFE STYLE IS SIMPLE AND DEVOID OF LUXURIES, ALTHOUGH HIS EXTREME FONDNESS OF POMP IN PUBLIC CEREMONIES IS FURTHER PROOF, FOR TURBAY'S DETRACTORS, 9* #8 :4- ,3 . WHILE THE BETANCURS DINE OUT WITH AND ARE WELCOME MEMBERS OF UPPER CLASS CIRCLES OF ANY POLITICAL PERSUASION, TURBAY IS MORE AT HOME WITH POLITICIANS OF LESS THAN ARISTOCRATIC ORIGINS. AS FAR AS IS KNOWN, THE TURBAYS HAVE NEVER BEEN INVITED TO SAN CARLOS PALACE TO SPEND AN EVENING FOR TV AND DRINKS EN FAMILLE WITH THE LOPEZES, AS HAVE THE

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BETANCURS. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE TURBAY AT EAST WITH THE RELATIVELY PATRICIAN PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY.

5. THE WAY IN WHICH BOTH MEN HAVE REACHED THE THRESHOLD OF THE PRESIDENCY IS ALSO SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT. TUBAY IS THE FOREMOST REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CLASS OF FULL-TIME POLITICIANS OF MORE OR LESS UNDISTINGUISHED ORIGIN, MANY BUT NOT ALL OF THEM BOSSES OR WARDHEELERS, WHICH HAS NOW ASSUMED CONTROL OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AND HAS ESSENTIALLY DISPLACED THE CLASS OF GENTLEMEN POLITICIANS REPRESENTED BY THE LOPEZES, THE LLERASES AND THE BARCOS. (THE REASONS FOR THIS CHANGE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE FUTURE WILL BE A WORTHY SUBJECT FOR FUTURE STUDY.) TURBAY IS THE TRUE EXPRESSION, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, OF WHAT HIS PARTY HAS BECOME. BETANCUR IS NOT. HE WAS NOMINATED BY THE TWO BITTERLY RIVAL CONSERVATIVE FACTIONS AS THE ONLY NATIONALLY KNOWN CONSERVATIVE WHO HAD NOT IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH AND WAS NOT UNACCEPTABLE TO EITHER FACTION AND WHO, BECAUSE HE HAD BROAD APPEAL, ESPECIALLY OUTSIDE THE MINORITY PARTY, STOOD THE BEST CHANCE TO BE ELECTED. THE MAN CLOSEST TO THE HEARTS OF REAL CONSERVATIVES, HOWEVER, IS STILL ALVARO GOMEZ WHOSE APPEAL THE 1974 ELECTION SHOWED TO BE TOO NARROW. BETANCUR, FOR MOST CONSERVATIVES, IS A MEANS TO AN END - THE BEST CHANCE AVAILABLE FOR THE CONSERVATIVES TO WIN THE

1978 ELECTION. FOR THE FACTION LEADERS, GOMEZ AND EX-PRESIDENT PASTRANA, HIS VICTORY IN 1978 WOULD IMPROVE THE CHANCES OF EITHER OF THEM IN THE 1982 PRESIDENTIAL RACE; THE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT CANNOT SUCCEED HIMSELF.

6. WHAT SOME OF THE MORE IMMEDIATE BENEFITS MIGHT BE TO THE CONSERVATIVES, OF A BETANCUR PRESIDENCY, ARE NOT CLEAR. WHILE TURBAY'S SUPPORTERS CAN EXPRESS INFORMED OPINIONS ABOUT THE GENERAL THRUST OF A TURBAY GOVERNMENT AND THE COMPOSITION OF HIS CABINET, BETANCUR'S CAN DO NEITHER. HIS VAGUE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISITAN DEMOCRACY CUM CORPORATIVISM (BOGOAT A-002) IS ALIEN TO THEM, HE IS BEHOLDEN TO NO PARTICULAR PERSON OF FACTION AND THEREFORE RELATIVELY UNSUSCEPTIBLE TO INFLUENCE OR PRESSURE REGARDING APPOINTMENTS, POLICIES OR - THEY NOW COMPLAIN -
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CAMPAIGN STYLE OR TACTICS.

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7. THE NATURE OF THE TWO CANDIDACIES IS ALSO SHARPLY DIFFERENTIATED. THE KEY FACTOR HERE IS THE STILL PERVASIVE NATIONAL TRAUMA OF THE 1948-53 VIOLENCIA, WHICH BOTH CANDIDATES ARE INVOKING IN THEIR OWN BEHALVES OR AGAINST THEIR OPPONENTS. BETANCUR DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS THE "NATIONAL CANDIDATE" AND ESCHEWS THE TITLE OF CONSERVATIVE. HE HAS WON THE ADHERENCE OF THE MAIN LINE ANAPO'S

REMNANTS AND OF THE MINISCULE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, PROBABLY NOT SO MUCH FOR THEIR MARGINAL ELECTORAL WEIGHT BUT BECAUSE THEIR SUPPORT OF HIS CAMPAIGN GIVES SOME MEANING TO THE TERM "NATIONAL". HE ACCUSES TURBAY, ON THE OTHER HAND, OF BEING A "SECTARIAN" LIBERAL CANDIDATE, WHICH TURBAY DENIES, CORRECTLY POINTING OUT THAT HIS ENTIRE CAREER DEMONSTRATES HIS WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH CONSERVATIVES. THE LIBERALS CHARGE THAT BETANCUR'S "NATIONAL" CANDIDACY IS JUST A SCREEN TO COVER THE REALITY: THAT BETANCUR IS ALVARO GOMEZ' FRONT MAN. GOMEZ TOGETHER WITH HIS FATHER, THE LATE EX-PRESIDENT LAUREANO GOMEZ, ARE FEARED AND HATED BY MOST LIBERALS BECAUSE OF THEIR ACTIVITIES BEFORE AND DURING THE VIOLENCIA. LIBERALS, HARKING BACK TO THE LAUEANO GOMEZ EXPERIENCE, FURTHER RAISE THE SPECTER OF THE VIOLENCIA BY CLAIMING THAT THE MINORITY CONSERVATIVES COULD ONLY GOVERN COLOMBIA BY FORCE. BOTH CANDIDATES IN FACT ARE CORRECT IN THIS DESCRIPTION OF THEIR OWN CANDIDACIES. TURBAY IS FRANKLY LIBERAL BUT NOT NARROWLY SECTARIAN
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AND WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY INCLUDE CONSERVATIVES IN HIS GOVERNMENT, AS REQUIRED BY THE CONSTITUTION. BETANCUR HAS RUN AS A "NATIONAL" CANDIDATE IN HIS TWO PREVIOUS TRIES FOR THE PRESIDENCY. HE BOASTS PRIVATELY THAT HE WAS ONCE "EXCOMMUNICATED" FROM THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FOR "HERESY," AND HE IS INDEED A HETERODOX CONSERVATIVE.

8. AS A RESULT OF THE ABOVE, THERE MAY BE SIGNIFICANT CROSS-OVER VOTING IN JUNE. SEVERAL OLD-LINE CONSERVATIVES HAVE TOLD EMB OFFS THAT THEY VOTED FOR TURBAY LISTS IN FEBRUARY AND WILL VOTE FOR HIM IN JUNE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT TRUST WHAT THEY UNDERSTAND OF BETANCUR'S IDEAS, WHILE THEY PERCEIVE TURBAY AS MORE CONSERVATIVE IN HIS APPROACH TO PROBLEMS, AND MORE PRAGMATIC AND PREDICTABLE THAN BETANCUR. SOME LIBERALS WILL CROSS-OVER TO BETANCUR, INCLUDING AN UNKNOWN BUT PROBABLY SMALL NUMBER OF UNRECONCILED FOLLOWERS OF EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS, AND OTHERS FOR REASONS OF SNOBBERY AND QUASI-RACISM OVER TURBAY'S SOCIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS.

9. DESPITE THE NON-SECTARIAN NATURE OF THE TWO CANDIDATES, THE HERITAGE OF THE OLD LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE BLOOD FEUD IS LIKELY TO BE BROUGHT TO THE FORE AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN PROCEEDS. SOME LIBERAL PARTY SOURCES HAVE TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THEY INTEND TO EMPHASIZE LIBERAL FEARS AS A DEVICE TO BRING OUT THE LIBERAL VOTE AND BEACUSE THEY THEMSELVES BELIEVE THAT THE CONSERVATIVES CAN ONLY GOVERN BY VIOLENCE. THE CONSERVATIVES CAN BE EXPECTED TO REPLY IN KIND. THE EMBASSY DOUBTS THAT MAJOR LEADERS OF EITHER PARTY WILL INDULGE IN BLOODY SHIRT WAVING. SOME FANATICAL LOCAL LEADERS MAY, HOWEVER, WHICH WOULD INCREASE THE TEMPERATURE AND PACE OF THIS RELATIVELY, UNTIL NOW, SOMNOLENT CAMPAIGN, BUT PROBABLY NOT ENOUGH TO RISK DAMAGING THE BIPARTISAN COOPERATION WHICH HAS BENEFITTED BOTH PARTIES AND COLOMBIAN DEMOCRACY DURING THE PAST TWENTY YEARS. THE EMBASSY WILL MONITOR

THIS PHENOMENON CLOSELY.

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